

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BANGKO 00163 01 OF 02 051343Z

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AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC

COMUSMACTHAI

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 0163

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, TH

SUBJECT: MEETING OF SENATOR J. BENNETT JOHNSTON WITH THAI FOREIGN
MINISTER CHATCHAI

SUMMARY. SENATOR J. BENNETT JOHNSTON (DEMOCRAT, LOUISIANA)

PAID 45 MINUTE CALL ON THAI FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI ON

JANUARY 3. DISCUSSION COVERED GENERAL SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST

ASIA FOLLOWING FALL OF VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA. THAI RELATIONS WITH
NEW COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS IN INDOCHINA, AND U.S.-THAI RELATIONS.
DIEGO GARCIA TOUCHED ON BRIEFLY. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING 45-MINUTE CONVERSATION JANUARY 3 IN COURSE OF CALL
BY SENATOR J. BENNETT JOHNSTON, THAI FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI
DISCUSSED THAI RELATIONS WITH NEW COMMUNIST STATES OF INDOCHINA
AT SOME LENGTH, IN PART COVERING POINTS ALREADY REPRRTED TO
DEPARTMENT, BUT PROVIDING SOME NEW INSIGHTS. CHARGE D'AFFAIRES
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 00163 01 OF 02 051343Z

AND POLITICAL COUNSELOR ACCOMPANIED SENATOR JOHNSTON AND HIS

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, CHARLES W. MCBRIDE, ON CALL.

2. GENERAL SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

CHATCHAI SAID IN WAKE OF EVENTS IN INDOCHINA THAILAND INITIALLY FORESAW TWO BELTS OF COUNTRIES TO THE EAST AND NORTH: (1) NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM, UNDER SOVIET INFLUENCE; AND (2) LAOS AND CAMBODIA UNDER CHINESE INFLUENCE. UNFORTUNATELY, ONLY LAOS IS NOW UNDER CHINESE INFLUENCE. THUS, ALIGNMENT NOW CONSISTS OF GROUP COMPRISING NORTH VIETNAM, SOUTH VIETNAM, LAOS AND THE SOVIET UNION; AND GROUP COMPRISING THAILAND, CAMBODIA, PRC, EVENTUALLY THE U.S., AND, PERHAPS ASEAN. IN REFERRING TO THESE GROUPS OR BELTS OF COUNTRIES CHATCHAI MADE CLEAR HE WAS NOT REFERRING TO ANY ORGANIZED OR COHERENT GROUPING BUT RATHER "TENDENCIES."

3. CHATCHAI SAID THAT CHINA WAS VERY MUCH CONCERNED OVER WAY SOVIET INFLUENCE HAD INCREASED IN INDOCHINA. HE SAID THAT CHINA MAY HAVE MISCALCULATED SEQUENCE OF EVENTS. PRC HAD NOT BEEN UNHAPPY WHEN NORTH VIETNAM IN EFFECT CONQUERED SOUTH VIETNAM, BUT CHINESE HAD NOT ANTICIPATED THAT SOVIETES WOULD COME TO EXERCISE DOMINANT INFLUENCE IN LAOS, WHICH IS A LANDLOCKED STATE WITH DIFFICULT ACCESS TO THE SOVIETS. HE NOTED THAT CHINESE HAD RECENTLY INDICATED AN INTEREST IN EXTENDING A ROAD FROM CHINA TO LUANG PRABANG AND INTERPRETED THIS INTEREST AS A CHINESE RESPONSE TO EXPANSION OF SOVIET INFLUENCE IN LAOS. VIENTIANE'S REACTION TO CHINESE FEELERS REGARDING THIS ROAD WOULD SIGNAL FUTURE TRENDS IN LAOS OVER NEXT SEVERAL YEARS.

4. INDIAN OCEAN

CHATCHAI SAID THAT FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIAN OCEAN WOULD BE OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO THAILAND. SENATOR JOHNSTON ASKED FOR HIS VIEW OF U.S. DEVELOPMENT OF FACILITIES ON DIEGO LARCA. CHATCHAI REPLIED THAT DIEGO GARCIA IS ONLY SMALL ISLAND, NOT RPT NOT LARGE ENOUGH TO BECOME SIGNIFICANT COUNTER IN INDIAN OCEAN DEVELOPMENTS. SENATOR JOHNSTON NOTED THAT U.S. FACILITIES BEING CONSTRUCTED ARE ESSENTIALLY LIMITED TO COMMUNICATIONS AND REFUELING. CHATCHAI AGAIN DISMISSED DIEGO GARCIA AS TOO SMALL TO BE SIGNIFICANT IN PRACTICAL TERMS. HOWEVER, HE SAID CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 00163 01 OF 02 051343Z

THAT PURPOSE OF FACILITIES MAY BE TO MAKE PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE TO COUNTRIES FACING INDIAN OCEAN AND, IF THIS WAS PURPOSE, IT WAS ALL RIGHT.

5. THAI RELATIONS WITH INDOCHINA COUNTRIES

CHATCHAI SAID THAT AFTER FALL OF SAIGON AND PHNOM PENH THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS HAD MISCALCULATED, BELIEVING THAT THAILAND

WAS "A MEMBER OF THE DOMINO CLUB." HE SAID THAT THE DOMINO CLUB HAD ONLY FOUR MEMBERS, IN FACT: NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM, LAOS, AND CAMBODIA.

6. VIETNAM

CHATCHAI SAID THAILAND RECEIVED A VISIT FROM COMMUNIST SOUTH VIETNAMESE FIRST. THREE REPRESENTATIVES CAME TO BANGKOK IN MAY, 1975. AGREEMENT WAS QUICKLY REACHED TO NORMALIZE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND NOT RPT NOT TO INTERFERE IN EACH OTHER'S DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. HOWEVER, IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH AGREEMENT ON VIETNAMESE DEMAND FOR RETURN OF AIRCRAFT FLOWN TO THAILAND BY PERSONNEL OF GVN. CHATCHAI TOLD THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE THAT THAILAND HAD IMPOUNDED THE AIRCRAFT AND SUGGESTED THAT THEY TALK TO THE U.S. ABOUT CUSTODY OF THIS EQUIPMENT. CHATCHAI SAID THAT A DEADLOCK ENSUED. HE ASKED THE COMMUNIST SOUTH VIETNAMESE WHY THEY WANTED AIRCRAFT, SINCE MOST OF THOSE LEFT IN THAILAND WERE "JUNK". THE VIETNAMESE SAID THEY WANTED THEM BACK AS RECOGNITION OF THEIR SOVEREIGNTY. CHATCHAI SAID HE SUGGESTED THEY SIGN A COMMUNIQUE DESPITE REMAINING DIFFERENCES ON THIS ISSUE BUT THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE REFUSED TO DO SO. CHATCHAI ADDED TO SENATOR JOHNSTON THAT IT WAS MOST IMPORTANT THAT CONTACTS WITH COMMUNIST SOUTH VIETNAMESE NOT RPT NOT DAMAGE RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. BETWEEN SAIGON/HANOI AND WASHINGTON, HE SAID, THAILAND WOULD CHOOSE WASHINGTON EVERY TIME.

7. CHATCHAI SAID THE SAIGON DELEGATION WAS FOLLOWED BY A GROUP DRV DELEGATION VISIT TO BANGKOK OF SEVEN PEOPLE FROM HANOI, LED BY THE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER. AGREEMENT WAS QUICKLY REACHED ON ESTABLISHMENT OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND NON-INTERFERENCE IN EACH OTHER'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS (INCLUDING AGREEMENT NOT TO LET EACH OTHER'S TERRITORY BE USED FOR ATTACKS AGAINST THE OTHER PARTY). HOWEVER, AGAIN THERE WAS NO AGREEMENT ON AIRCRAFT, AS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BANGKO 00163 01 OF 02 051343Z

THE DRV INSISTED THAT THAILAND RETURN TO SOUTH VIETNAM AIRCRAFT FLOWN TO THAILAND BY GVN PERSONNEL. CHATCHAI SAID THAT HE TOLD DRV DELEGATION THIS MATTER WAS NOT THEIR BUSINESS, NOTING MATTER HAD ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED WITH SOUTH VIETNAMESE DELEGATION. HE ASKED WHY DRV DELEGATION PRESUMED TO SPEAK ON BEHALF OF SOUTH VIETNAM. DRV DELEGATION REPLIED THAT TWO PARTS OF VIETNAM SOON WOULD BE REUNITED AND, PRESSED BY CHATCHAI TTUIR TE#TIME FRAME,

SAID REUNIFICATION WOULD TAKE PLACE IN FOUR TO FIVE YEARS.

NOTE BY OC/T: #AS RECEIVED

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 00163 02 OF 02 051409Z

46

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AMEMBASSY MANILA

USLO PEKING

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 0163

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8. SENATOR JOHNSTON ASKED HOW MANY AIRCRAFT WERE INVOLVED.

CHARGE BRIEFLY REVIEWED THE NUMBERS OF AIRCRAFT AND RETURN TO U.S. OF HIGHER-PERFORMANCE AIRCRAFT (F-5E'S, IN PARTICULAR).

CHARGE ADDED HIS VIEW THAT DRV SOUGHT TO USE ISSUE TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THAILAND.

9. CHATCHAI SAID HE PROPOSED FURTHER TALKS WITH DRV IN HANOI, BUT NO AGREEMENT WAS REACHED ON MATTER. DRV DELEGATION HAD RELENTLESSLY GONE OVER SAME GROUND FOR REMAINING FOUR DAYS OF THEIR STAY IN BANGKOK, BUT WITHOUT AGREEMENT. DRV DELEGATION ALSO DECLINED TO SIGN JOINT COMMUNIQUE AT END OF VISIT.

10. LAOS

SUBSEQUENT TO DRV DELEGATION VISIT TO LAOS, CHATCHAI CONTINUED, DRV PUT PRESSURE ON LAOS TO UNDERTAKE CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT. THE PRC WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE SITUATION IN LAOS, BUT EVIDENTLY BELIEVED IT COULD CONTROL DEVELOPMENTS. HOWEVER, CHATCHAI SAID THAT HE HAD WARNED PRC FOREIGN MINISTER CHIAO KUAN-HUA THAT PRC CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 00163 02 OF 02 051409Z

WTULD LOSE INFLUENCE IN BOTH LAOS AND CAMBODIA. CHINESE TOOK ACTION IN TIME TO RETAIN INFLUENCE IN CAMBODIA.

11. CHATCHAI SAID THAT LAOS IS COUNTRY WITH "VERY WEAK" PEOPLE. HE SAID THAILAND HAD CLOSED BORDER WITH LAOS BECAUSE OF SERIES OF PROBLEMS THAT HAD DEVELOPED. HOWEVER, HE HAD INVITED LAOS TO SEE D CULTURAL TROUPE TO ATTEND SOUTHEAST ASIAN MUSIC AND DANCE FESTIVAL IN BANGKOK AND, WHEN THEY ACCEPTED, BORDER WITH LAOS WAS REOPENED. BORDER IS OPEN FROM 0830 TO 1630 DAILY, OPPOSITE NONG KHAI. THAILAND WANTS ASSURANCES THAT IT WILL RECEIVE NO MORE LAO REFUGEES AND THAT THERE WILL BE NO ARMS SMUGGLING.

12. CHATCHAI SAID THAT STVIET AMBASSADOR IN BANGKOK HAD PUT HEAVY PRESSURE ON HIM TO REOPEN BORDER BETWEEN THAILAND AND LAOS, ALLEGING THERE ARE LARGE AMOUNTS OF SOVIET AID COMMODITIES IN THAILAND AWAITING DELIVERY TO LAOS, AND EXPRESSING CONCERN THAT FOOD PRODUCTS AMONG AID ITEMS MIGHT SPOIL IN HEAT AND EXPLODE. CHATCHAI SAID HE REPLIED TO SOVIET AMBASSADOR THAT IF SOVIET FOOD EXPLODES, THAI WILL AT LEAST KNOW WHETHER ITEMS CONTAIN EXPLOSIVES OR FOOD. CHATCHAI NOTED THE PRC HAD EARMARKED AID FOR LAOS. HOWEVER, CHINESE MADE CLEAR THAT THEY WOULD SEND AID TO LAOS ONLY AFTER BORDER REOPENED. CHINESE HAD NOT RPT NOT ASKED RTG TO REOPEN BORDER.

13. CAMBODIA

CHATCHAI EXPRESSED GENERAL SATISFACTION WITH RELATIONS WITH CAMBODIA. HE NOTED THERE HAD BEEN INCIDENT ON THAI-CAMBODIAN BORDER (CLEAR REFERENCE TO TA PHRYA AFFAIR), BUT THIS WAS RESULT OF FACT THAT THERE ARE MANY CAMBODIAN GROUPS MILLING ABOUT NEAR THAI BORDER, INCLUDING BANDITS, OPPONENTS OF NEW CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT, AND KHMER ROUGE TROOPS. HE SAID THAT HE SAW NO IMMEDIATE PROBLEM WITH CAMBODIA AND ADDED THAT SITUATION IN GULF OF THAILAND WAS CALM.

14. U.S.-THAI RELATIONS

SENATOR JOHNSTON ASKED CHATCHAI IF HE WAS SATISFIED WITH STATE OF U.S.-THAI RELATIONS. IN REPLY CHATCHAI EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION WITH THE UNCERTAINTIES SURROUNDING U.S. AID, COMPARING IT TO A CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BANGKO 00163 02 OF 02 051409Z

RACING CAR WHICH CAN MOVE FAST BUT FREQUENTLY BREAKS DOWN. BY CONTRAST, HE SAID SOVIET AID TO ITS FRIENDS WAS SLOW BUT STEADY, LIKE A FREIGHT TRAIN.

15. CONTINUING, CHATCHAI SAID THAILAND HAD ALLOWED U.S. TO USE

THAI TERRITORY DURING VIETNAM WAR TO BOMB TARGETS IN VIETNAM. THEN, ONE DAY, U.S. DECIDED TO STOP BOMBING, LEAVING THAILAND HOLDING THE BAG. HE SAID THAT U.S. MISSION IN BANGKOK WAS VERY GOOD AND SHOWS GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF THAI PSYCHOLOGY. HOWEVER, U.S. CONGRESS CHANGED ITS COURSE SUDDENLY AND LEFT THAILAND IN LURCH.

16. CHATCHAI THEN WENT ON TO COVER GROUND HE HAD BEEN OVER ON NUMEROUS TIMES WITH MISSION AND IN WASHINGTON. U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE HAS GONE ON FOR 25 YEARS, HE SAID, WHEN ASSISTANCE STOPS, THAILAND CANNOT PRODUCE ITS OWN MILITARY NEEDS. MOREOVER, THAILAND IS CONCERNED THAT U.S. IS RETREATING TO AN "ISLAND STRATEGY" LEAVING THAILAND TO FACE THE MUSIC.

17. SENATOR JOHNSTON ASKED IF U.S. SHOULD RETURN WITH ITS AIR FORCE UNITS AND TROOPS. CHATCHAI REPLIED THAT THIS WAS NOT DESIRABLE AS THINGS STAND. PRESIDENT FORD TRIED TO HELP THAILAND, BUT IF CONGRESS WOULD OPPOSE SUCH ACTION THEN THAILAND AND U.S. AID WOULD SUFFER. HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD REASONS IN MIND OF CONGRESS: (1) CONGRESS DOES NOT WANT U.S. "CHILDREN" TO BE KILLED; (2) CONGRESS DOES NOT WANT ITS "CHILDREN" TO MARRY THAI. HE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGY FROM HAVING LIVED IN U.S. CHATCHAI EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR ASSISTANCE FROM SECRETARY KISSINGER IN ARRANGING FOR WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN FORCES AND FOR TELLING CHATCHAI (WHICH HE PUBLICIZED) THAT DIVISIONS ON U.S. FOCUS IN THAILAND WERE UP TO RTG. AS A RESULT OF WAY IN WHICH WITHDRAWAL WAS HANDLED, NO ONE IN THAILAND NOW PRESSES FOR FURTHER WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES BUT, ON CONTRARY, MANY THAI NOW FEEL ISOLATED AS U.S. FORCES LEAVE.

18. CHATCHAI SAID THAT THAILAND HAS SUFFICIENT MANPOWER. WHAT IT NEEDS IS MODERN EQUIPMENT, WHICH IT MUST LEARN TO MANUFACTURE ITSELF. HE NOTED THAT, IN MANY CASES, THAI ARMED FORCES ARE STILL USING EQUIPMENT DATING BACK TO 1950. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, CHATCHAI SAID THAT HE WAS IN TOUCH WITH U.S. ARMAMENTS MANUFACTURERS, WHO WERE INTERESTED
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PAGE 04 BANGKO 00163 02 OF 02 051409Z

IN BUILDING A FACTORY TO PRODUCE ARMAMENTS IN THAILAND. CHATCHAI SAID THAT WHAT WOULD BE NEEDED WAS U.S. GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF SUCH A FACTORY IN THAILAND. THE CHARGE SAID HE WAS CONFIDENT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WOULD ENCOURAGE U.S. PRIVATE INDUSTRY TO ESTABLISH SUCH FACILITIES IN THAILAND. CHATCHAI SAID THAT THE PROPOSED FACTORY OR FACTORIES WOULD PRODUCE .50 CALIBER, 81 MM, MORTAR, AND 105 MM ARTILLERY AMMUNITION. THE FACTORY WOULD BE A JOINT VENTURE BETWEEN RTG AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, WITH PRODUCTION FOR THAI ARMED FORCES AND FOR EXPORT TO OTHER ASEAN NATIONS. HE SAID HE WOULD DISCUSS THIS MATTER FURTHER AT THE ASEAN SUMMIT MEETING IN FEBRUARY.

19. SENATOR JOHNSTON SAID HE THOUGHT THE U. S. WAS REASSURED BY EVIDENCE OF THAI STABILITY AND CONTINUED RESPECT FOR DEMOCRACY. HE SAID THAT THE THAI IMAGE IN THE U.S. WAS REASSURED BY EVIDENCE OF THAI STABILITY AND CONTINUED RESPECT FOR EEMOCRACY. HE SAID THAT THE THAI IMAGE IN THE U.S. AND IN THE U.S. SENATE WAS GOOD. AS THE U.S. SEES THAILAND CONTINUING UNDER A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, HE BELIEVED THE SENATE WOULD BE WILLING TO CONTINUE TO DEVOTE RESOURCES TO HELP THAI DEVELOPMENT. SENATOR JOHNSTON SAID THAT THE U.S. RELATIONSHIP WITH THAILAND IS A KEY FEATURE OF THE SITUATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. HE THOUGHT THE U. S. WOULD BE ABLE TO ANNOUNCE A MORE DEFINITIVE PACISIC POLICY AFTER THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, WHICH WOULD INVOLVE THE CONTINUED COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES BUT NOT U.S. COMBAT PERSONNEL.

20. CHATCHAI CONCLUDED THAT HE COULD ASSURE SENTATOR JOHNSTON THAT RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. WERE GOOD. WHAT WAS NEEDED NEXT WAS REVISON OF THE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM ALONG THE LINES PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED.

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